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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8823

INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE

RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1870

RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 5348

RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8941

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6517

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI

RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 4346

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2335

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000194

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP AND IO; PACOM FOR FPA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/25/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM BM

SUBJECT: BURMA: MLS DIRECTOR MEETING WITH NLD UNCLES

REF: A. RANGOON 50

1B. RANGOON 96

1C. RANGOON 111

Classified By: Pol Officer Sean O'Neill for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

Summary

11. (C) In a March 25 meeting with visiting EAP/MLS Office Director Stephen Blake and Charge, the National League for Democracy's Central Executive Committee (CEC aka the Uncles) explained the NLD is not opposed to participation in the 2010 elections, but would not take part unless there is a review of the constitution and release of political prisoners first.

If the regime allows the NLD "a bit of breathing space," CEC member Nyunt Wai suggested the NLD could find ways to work cooperatively for Burma's future. Mr. Blake reiterated U.S. concern for Burma and explained the goal of our ongoing policy review is to achieve meaningful change. The Uncles urged the U.S. to speak "loudly and clearly" to the regime. Khin Maung Swe reiterated his theme that the USG should negotiate with the regime, seeking release of political prisoners and dialogue for the NLD on the future, with sanctions on the table. The Uncles told us they support foreign humanitarian aid so long as it does not benefit the regime, but insisted the U.S. should consult with the NLD on any potential aid programs. The NLD hopes UNSYG Ban will make any Burma visit conditional on genuine progress, but the Uncles said they would welcome him in any case. End Summary.

Elections: Willing to Wait

12. (C) In a March 24 meeting with the Uncles, NLD CEC member and recently-released political prisoner Win Tin told Charge and visiting EAP/MLS Director Stephen Blake the NLD is not opposed to participation in the 2010 elections, but would not take part unless there is a review of the constitution and a release of political prisoners first. Khin Maung Swe said, and then retracted, that the regime has "indirectly" contacted the Uncles to urge participation. Nyunt Wai said that what the NLD needs is "a bit of breathing space." With that, the party could find a way to negotiate with the regime about Burma's future. Nyunt Wai added that flawed elections will not promote democracy, which in the end is the goal. We

have been waiting for 19 years, Win Tin pointed out, we can wait another five or longer if necessary. When Mr. Blake asked whether the CEC believes participation, even in flawed elections, might result in progress as has sometimes been the case elsewhere, Win Tin said the situation in Burma is different. As it stands, the constitution and elections have been designed to perpetuate the regime's hold on power, so participating will not hasten the regime change to democracy which remains the NLD's ultimate goal.

The U.S. Role

¶13. (C) Mr. Blake reiterated U.S. concern for Burma and stressed that the goal of our ongoing policy review is to achieve meaningful change. When asked, Mr. Blake explained the purpose of any engagement, writ large, would be to find out more about the regime's thinking in order to hasten change. Nyunt Wai urged us to confront the government directly with concerns without being "too diplomatic." Speaking loudly and clearly for what you believe in is the "American way," he said. Win Tin recommended the U.S. also continue to engage with China on Burma, explaining that without China, change is "impossible."

¶14. (C) Turning to sanctions, the Uncles explained that sanctions are a matter of U.S. policy and the NLD does not have a formal position on them. Having said that, Khin Maung Swe suggested economic sanctions have been useful in that they have affected the regime and its cronies. He then

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reiterated his recent theme (refs A, B, and C) that the U.S. should engage in "negotiations," "give and take" with the regime to see what can possibly be achieved. Khin Maung Swe made clear he sees release of all political prisoners and a dialogue as the required deliverables from the regime side. He has previously indicated relief from "sanctions" could be a U.S. carrot in exchange.

Humanitarian Aid

¶15. (C) Charge and Mr. Blake raised the significant, and successful, U.S. contribution to the Nargis relief effort and asked the Uncles for their opinion on foreign humanitarian aid in general. Win Tin explained that the NLD supports the idea of humanitarian assistance so long as the money gets to the people, but believes in practice the majority of aid does not get to those who need it due to government corruption. In order to prevent this, the Uncles insisted the U.S. should consult with them on all assistance plans for Burma.

UNSYG Ban Visit

¶16. (C) Win Tin explained the NLD hopes UNSYG Ban makes any Burma visit conditional on genuine progress, including the release of prisoners and the start of genuine dialogue. The Uncles are concerned that Ban be careful not to diminish his stature by visiting Burma without obtaining tangible results.

However, the Uncles said they respect the UNSYG's office and would welcome him no matter what.

Comment

¶17. (C) The Uncles -- most in their 80s and 90s -- still have a long-range perspective and seem quite willing to wait beyond the 2010 elections if necessary. Still, this was the first time we've heard Nyunt Wai - or any Uncle - comment that the NLD could work with the regime if provided "a bit of breathing space." Clearly Khin Maung Swe remains convinced the USG should engage in "give and take" negotiations with the regime. Interestingly, unlike in February, no other Uncles rose up in the latest meeting to dispute that

analysis. Unfortunately, the regime does not appear interested in reviewing the constitution or release all of Burma's political prisoners as the NLD rightfully demands.
DINGER